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Southern Area Public Library Named “Best Small Library in America 2013” by the *Library Journal* and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Lost Creek, WV. The *Library Journal* and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have named the Southern Area Public Library (SAPL) the Best Small Library in America for 2013.

“It’s great to be recognized for our hard work,” said library director Mary Beth Stenger, who wrote the winning grant application. The award comes with \$20,000 to spend on anything in the library, plus money to send Stenger and one of her staff to the Public Library Association Conference in 2014.

To win “Best Small Library in America,” the Southern Area Public Library had to demonstrate accomplishments over time. “The Journal was looking for a library that had turned itself around,” Stenger said. “Since I took over in July, 2010, patron visits went from 3,000 to almost 8,000, an increase of 156%. Our computer usage increased 32%. Our programming increased 888%. We made a lot of changes that brought people in.”

The award looked at technology use as well. The library has an up-to-date website, a Facebook page, a Google calendar, and accounts with Twitter and Pinterest. “We stay involved online,” according to Stenger.

Demonstrating collaborative efforts was also important for the award. The library sponsors a different charity each month and invites patrons to make donations. In January, library volunteers created “birthday in a box” kits for children at the Clarksburg Mission. With the kits, homeless children in the shelter can “open the box and have a party.”

The *Library Journal* considered whether the library had features that other libraries can replicate. “We are the first library in the state to be part of the Geek the Library program,” Stenger said. Geek the Library creates awareness about library funding. “We’re hoping to get other libraries in West Virginia excited about that.”

Lost Creek, home of the Southern Area Public Library, is a Harrison County community of fewer than 500. The library draws patrons from neighboring communities and even other counties. The library’s collection of home schooling resources is one reason. “We have two shelves of home schooling materials that people can check out for a whole semester,” Stenger said.

The Southern Area Public Library is a fixture of Lost Creek and the surrounding area. “For a lot of people in the community, we are their home away from home,” Stenger said. “We have kids get off the bus here and spend the afternoon. We have snacks for them.”

Resources related to the article

“Best Small Library in America 2013: Southern Area Public Library, WV.” Barry, John N. *Library Journal*. January 25, 2013. <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/01/awards/best-small-library-in-america-2013-southern-area-public-library-wv>

The Southern Area Public Library: <http://southernarea.lib.wv.us>